

Draft
Environmental Assessment

**Land Exchange between
Pablo Wildlife Management Area
and Private Property adjacent to
Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area**

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Prepared by

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and the

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Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration
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PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the proposed action is to benefit wildlife, primarily waterfowl and upland game birds, through the exchange of approximately 223 acres of state-owned land in the northern portion of Pablo Wildlife Management Area (Pablo WMA) by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) for 240 acres of private property adjacent to the southwest portion of Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area (Ninepipe WMA) in order to preserve the diverse array of upland and wetland species present in that area. Federal fiscal obligations from the 223 acres of Pablo WMA will be transferred to the newly acquired 240 acres of private property to be added to Ninepipe WMA.

FWP purchased the Pablo parcels in the 1950s. These parcels were acquired in part with federal funds pursuant to the Pittman Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (PR Act). The parcels were added to Pablo WMA (formerly Pablo Game Bird Management Area). The need for the proposed action to dispose of the Pablo WMA tracts is that they no longer serve the intended purpose for which they were acquired due to changes in recreational, residential, and commercial development of the surrounding area. Nonnative dry grasslands with some planted pine primarily cover these parcels. Over time, wildlife managers have found the Pablo property more difficult to manage because of modifications to its configuration resulting in fewer benefits to wildlife and recreational users. FWP does not propose to dispose of any portions of the Pablo WMA adjacent to Pablo National Wildlife Refuge.

Ninepipe, in contrast, has retained its rural character and changes in surrounding private land use have not resulted in significant impacts to natural resources. It has grown through federal, tribal, and state land acquisitions and private land protections into a unique wildlife area for upland birds and waterfowl. The private land being considered for acquisition is adjacent to both existing federal and state wildlife areas and includes numerous wetlands and undeveloped uplands. There are three ecological community types within the Ninepipe property that were identified in the Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management Strategy (CFWCS, FWP 2005) as Community Types of Greatest Conservation Need. Those communities are riparian and wetland, mixed broadleaf, and sagebrush-grassland.

Riparian and wetland communities support the highest concentration of plants and animals in Montana. The property adjacent to Ninepipe WMA contains approximately 25 acres of wetland and riparian habitat. In Montana, riparian habitats provide breeding and nesting areas for at least 134 (55%) of Montana's 245 species of breeding birds, as well as much needed food and resting areas for migrating birds. There are 17 Tier I Species of Greatest Conservation Need that rely on riparian and wetland habitat for breeding and/or survival. Tier I species that have been observed at the Ninepipe WMA include bald eagle, trumpeter swan, and grizzly bear.

FWP is requesting approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR), to transfer the federal fiscal interest in the 223-acre portion of the Pablo WMA north of North Reservoir Road to other land interests at Ninepipe WMA and to approve the proposed land exchange. Seller will pay cash value deficiency and those funds will be returned to FWP's wildlife restoration account. More

detailed descriptions of the exchange properties and the benefits anticipated from the proposed action follow in the analysis sections of this environmental assessment.

Legal Descriptions and Locations of Properties

PABLO - FWP Owned Property and Originally Purchased with Wildlife Restoration Funds

Lake County, Montana

Township 22 North, Range 20 West

Parcel #1 - Section 20: N1/2SE1/4 east of the highway right of way (79.39 ac.)

Parcel #2 - Section 21: N1/2SW1/4 west of the irrigation ditch
(approx. 63.29 ac.)

Parcel #3 - Section 23: W1/2SW1/4 (80 acres)

Total: approximately 223 acres

The property is located within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation in the Mission Valley, north of North Reservoir Road and about 1.5 miles west of Highway 93. The nearest towns are Pablo and Polson. The terrain is fairly level to sloping south. Access is from maintained, paved public roads and the view of the reservoir and Pablo National Wildlife Refuge are somewhat blocked by a berm around the reservoir.

NINEPIPE - Private Property proposed for acquisition by FWP

Lake County, Montana

Township 19 North, Range 20 West

Parcel #1 - Section 9: SE1/4 (160 acres)

Parcel #2 - Section 10: W1/2NW1/4 (80 acres)

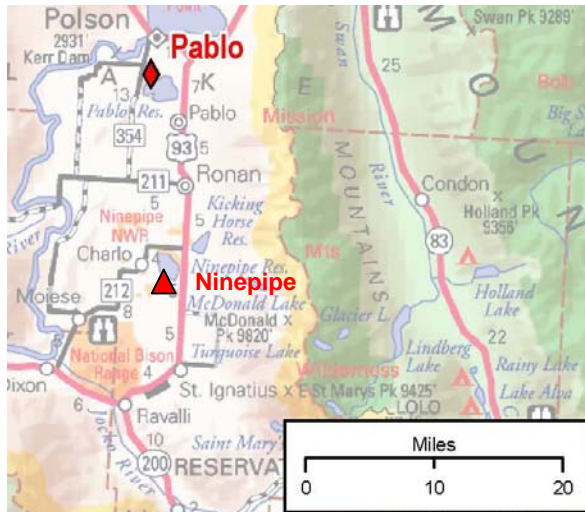
Total: 240 acres

The property is privately owned and also located within the Reservation's boundaries in the Mission Valley. The nearest town is Charlo. The terrain is level. Access is from a county-maintained, gravel road, which bisects the property. There is a USFWS easement for wildlife habitat conservation on the property. No public access is provided by the easement.

Summary of the USFWS conservation easement terms:

- Prohibits subdivision of property, wetland drainage, exploring for or development and extracting any materials, and waste dumping that is toxic to wildlife or that will contaminate soil or water.
- Prohibits the construction of any structures on Parcel #1. A single residence could be constructed on Parcel #2 with the consent of USFWS.
- Alterations to the topography or other natural resources by digging, excavating, plowing, filling, or otherwise destroying vegetative cover is prohibited unless USFWS approval is obtained.

Pablo WMA and Ninepipe WMA are approximately 19 miles apart.



AUTHORITY AND REGULATIONS

1. FWP

FWP has the authority to purchase lands that are suitable for game, bird, fish, or fur-bearing animal restoration, propagation, or protection; for public hunting, fishing, or trapping areas; and for state parks and outdoor recreation per State Statute 87-1-209.

The proposed action constitutes a state action subject to the Montana Environmental Policy Act and other applicable state statutes. FWP is required to analyze the impacts under these requirements before rendering a recommendation for action to the FWP Commission and Board of State Land Commissioners.

2. U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The proposed removal of the federal interest in the Pablo WMA tracts constitutes a federal action subject to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. USFWS is therefore required to prepare an environmental assessment to analyze the effects on the human environment and document the findings. USFWS will use this environmental assessment to determine if the proposed action is likely to result in significant impacts to the human environment. If it is determined that there are no significant adverse impacts, USFWS will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If it is determined, conversely, that significant impacts might occur, the Service would be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

ALTERNATIVES

1. PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action consists of a land exchange through which FWP would acquire 240 acres of private land adjacent to a federal waterfowl production and state wildlife

management areas at Ninepipe Reservoir. The land would be acquired through transfer of approximately 223 acres of FWP land from Pablo WMA into private ownership. The federal share of the appraised value of the Pablo WMA land (223 acres) would be transferred to the proposed acquisition tract at Ninepipe.

The Pablo WMA properties consist of three parcels totaling approximately 223 acres valued at approximately \$644,000. The private land at Ninepipe encompasses two parcels totaling 240 acres that are valued at \$600,000. The fair market values of the Pablo WMA properties and the proposed Ninepipe acquisition tract were determined through complete, self-contained appraisal reports conducted by a state-certified appraiser in accordance with the Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practice and the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions. An independent state-certified review appraiser reviewed the appraisals. The federal interest of the Pablo WMA tracts would be transferred to the new parcels near the Ninepipe WMA. Any difference in value between the FWP Pablo and privately owned Ninepipe exchange tract would be credited to the FWP Wildlife Restoration account to compensate that program using non-license FWP funds. It should be noted that the Pablo 223 acres are being surveyed to verify the acreage and value, so these numbers are estimates at this time.

If the exchange were approved, the new addition to Ninepipe WMA would be managed as part of that wildlife management area. The primary purposes would be for wildlife management, habitat enhancement, and public recreation, especially hunting. The Pablo land to be transferred out-of-state ownership would be managed privately. The new owners would be able to use it for whatever purposes are allowed by Lake County, Tribal and other local planning regulations. Before being acquired by FWP, the property was used for agricultural purposes, so it may be returned to that use in the future. It is relatively dry, partially fenced, and not used for grazing or other agricultural uses at this time. Some minimal upland game bird hunting does occur on the targeted parcels that would be transferred into private ownership. Surrounding land uses include hay and crop production, some commercial uses (auto speedway, gravel pit, radio station), and residential development. To the south of North Reservoir Road are Pablo Reservoir and Pablo National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), which are managed for both wildlife and irrigation purposes.

2. NO ACTION

FWP would continue to own the targeted Pablo parcels and the Wildlife Restoration Program's encumbrance on the parcels would remain unchanged. The land would remain open space and FWP would continue to manage the WMA for the benefit of wildlife and provide public access for hunting and other recreation activities.

The privately owned Ninepipe land would likely continue to be used for agricultural purposes in the future under the terms of the USFWS conservation easement.

3. OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM CONSIDERATION

Each of the following alternatives were considered and rejected due to limited wildlife benefits, current fiscal restrictions, and federal obligations:

- a. Offer the Pablo WMA land for sale at public auction: This scenario would allow FWP to dispose of the parcels. However monies gained by the sale would first need to be used to reimburse the USFWS since the property was originally purchased with funds pursuant to the PR Act. Any remaining funds would be deposited into the Real Property Trust Fund. FWP would not receive any monetary benefit from the auction and would gain no additional protection of wildlife habitat in the region.
- b. Sell or exchange the Pablo WMA land subject to a conservation easement: This alternative was dismissed from further consideration because it would not maximize monetary, wildlife, and resource values. Encumbering the parcels would protect the view shed, but it could also limit FWP's ability to dispose of the parcels in the future.
- c. Acquire the Ninepipe private land with state funds: This alternative was eliminated because FWP currently does not have the funds allocated to purchase the two parcels.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

1. PHYSICAL RESOURCES

A. Land Use

PABLO WMA: The three parcels are mostly unfenced and not used for agricultural purposes. The parcels are kept as open space to preserve grasslands for forage and nesting cover for game bird species.

NINEPIPE Private Property: Both parcels are entirely fenced. On Parcel #1 (160 acres) there are gathering corrals, a farm building, and other site improvements, but no residence. This parcel is currently used for cattle grazing. Parcel #2 (80 acres) is open space and has been used for a grazing area over the past two years. Cattle occasionally use wetlands and ponds as a source of water, but water features are primarily for waterfowl habitat and are left untouched by the landowner.

B. Soil and Prime/Unique Farmland

A search of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Survey database found the following soil types for the Pablo WMA land and Ninepipe private land identified for exchange:

PABLO WMA: Portions of the land would be considered "prime farmland if irrigated." None are irrigated. These portions are identified as #s 63, 64, 84, 102, 103, 104, and 155 on

the map below. Portions are also designated as "farmland of statewide and local importance" shown as #s 66, 67, 81, 85, 125, 130, 131, 132, 166, 167, 174 on the map. The soil types, generally silty and sandy loams, are identified on the map legend.

Full mineral rights are attached to the parcels. There are no known mineral severances with the parcels.

Parcels 1 & 2 are outlined in blue:



Map courtesy of the NRCS Web Soil Survey database.

Farmland Classification— Summary by Map Unit — Lake County Area, Montana				
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
63	Gird silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	0.2	0.1%
64	Gird silt loam, 2 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	8.0	5.7%
66	Gird-Vincom silt loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	5.1	3.6%
67	Gird-Vincom silt loams, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	2.5	1.7%
84	Keri loam, 2 to 4 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	27.8	19.7%
85	Keri loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	10.3	7.3%
103	McCollum fine sandy loam, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	0.2	0.1%
125	Niarada-Keri complex, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	5.0	3.5%
130	Polson silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	0.2	0.1%
131	Polson silt loam, 2 to 4 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	10.2	7.2%
132	Polson-Vincom silt loams, 4 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	3.3	2.3%
166	Truscreek-Polson silt loams, 0 to 2 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	9.5	6.7%
167	Truscreek-Polson silt loams, 2 to 4 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	58.9	41.8%
Totals for Area of Interest			140.9	100.0%

Parcel 3 is outlined in blue:



Map courtesy of the NRCS Web Soil Survey database.

Farmland Classification— Summary by Map Unit — Lake County Area, Montana				
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
81	Jocko gravelly loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	18.2	23.3%
104	McCollum fine sandy loam, gravelly substratum, 0 to 2 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	43.1	55.2%
155	Sacheen loamy fine sand, 0 to 8 percent slopes	Prime farmland if irrigated	16.8	21.5%
174	Walstead gravelly loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	0.1	0.1%
Totals for Area of Interest			78.1	100.0%

NINEPIPE Private Property: All of the private land is considered "farmland of local importance" and classified as post silt loam or post silty clay loam.

Full mineral rights are attached to the parcels. There are no known mineral severances with the parcels. Parcels #1 & #2 (240 acres) area are outlined in blue.



Map courtesy of the NRCS Web Soil Survey database.

Farmland Classification— Summary by Map Unit — Lake County Area, Montana				
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
133	Post silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	213.6	90.4%
134	Post silty clay loam, 2 to 4 percent slopes	Farmland of local importance	22.7	9.6%
Totals for Area of Interest			236.3	100.0%

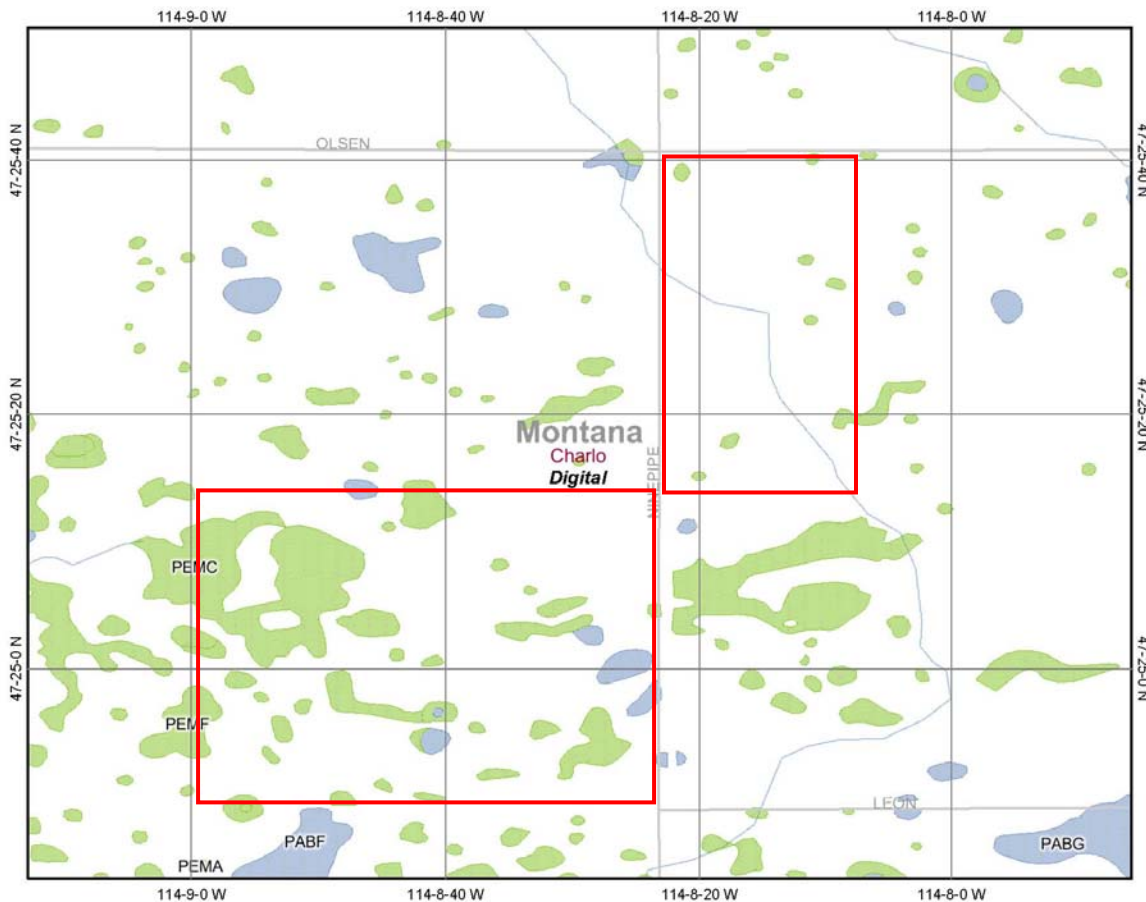
C. Air Quality

All of the parcels are currently open grasslands, wetlands, or semi-forested. Other than livestock use on the Ninepipe tract, no activities occur on the property that currently affect air quality.

D. Water Resources

PABLO WMA: The exchange property is dry with no recorded wells or water rights. There is a seasonal irrigation ditch running north/south in the NE1/4SW1/4 of Section 21. According to the Flathead Irrigation Project, 9.8 acres east of the ditch could be irrigated from the ditch, but are not currently used. FWP plans to retain ownership of all the land east of the ditch in the exchange. No wetlands or other water bodies occur on the property per the USFWS Wetlands Online Mapper. A search of well logs in the vicinity indicates well depths range from 340' to 632'.

NINEPIPE Private Property: The property proposed for addition to the Ninepipe WMA has ponds and numerous wetlands. A search completed on the USFWS Wetlands Online Mapper identified approximately 5 freshwater ponds encompassing approximately 3 acres and over a dozen freshwater emergent wetlands covering an estimated 25 acres. The bulk of the wetlands and ponds are within the 160-acre parcel. The Flathead Irrigation Project serves both parcels, which are flood irrigated through a system of ditches. There is a well on the 80-acre parcel, but it is not in use nor does it have a recorded water right. The following map shows the wetlands and ponds on private property to be acquired outlined in red.



Map courtesy of the USFWS Wetlands Online Mapper

E. Noise

All of the properties are currently open grasslands, wetlands, or semi-forested. Other than livestock use on the Ninepipe tract, no activities occur on the property that currently affect ambient noise levels.

2. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

A. Vegetation

PABLO WMA: The ground cover of the property is dry-planted forage grasses with a small portion in Section 21 consisting of native grassland. Approximately 50 acres have been planted to ponderosa pine in Section 23.

FWP controls small areas of weeds through mechanical and chemical means per the guidelines of FWP's Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan. There are small patches of Dalmatian toadflax (*Linaria dalmatica* (L.) Mill.), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), and Canadian thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) present on the parcels.

NINEPIPE Private Property: The ground cover is natural grass and improved forage grass intended for livestock. In addition to flood irrigation areas, there are several riparian and

wetland areas. There are a few scattered willow (*Salix × sepulcralis*) trees, but no timber cover.

For the past several summers, the both parcels have been rented to a local cattle producer for summer pasture with up to 160 head of cattle being placed on the acreage for approximately 6 months. Grazing on this Parcel #1 (160 acres) has taken place since the early 1990s and Parcel #2 (80 acres) has been grazed over the past couple of years.

This property is encumbered by a conservation easement by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the purpose of establishing wildlife habitat. The general provisions state that the landowner cannot drain or reconstruct any water ditches, existing wetlands must be maintained, haying and livestock grazing is allowed with USFWS permission, and subdivision, beyond one homesite, for any purpose other than agriculture, is prohibited.

B. Wildlife

Endangered, Threatened, or Candidate and State Sensitive Species

The Listed Endangered, Threatened, Proposed, and Candidate Species in Lake County as determined by the Montana Ecological Services Field Office are as follows:

LAKE COUNTY		
<i>Canis lupus</i>	Gray Wolf	DM
<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	Canada Lynx	LT, PCH
<i>Ursus arctos horribilis</i>	Grizzly Bear	LT
<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	Bull Trout	LT, CH
<i>Silene spaldingii</i>	Spalding's Campion	LT
<i>Howellia aquatilis</i>	Water Howellia	LT

State Sensitive Species known to occur in Lake County are as follows:

Group	Scientific Name	Common Name	State Rank
Mammals	<i>Bos bison</i>	Bison	S2
	<i>Canis lupus</i>	Gray Wolf	S3
	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	Townsend's Big-eared Bat	S2
	<i>Gulo gulo</i>	Wolverine	S3
	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	Canada Lynx	S3
	<i>Martes pennanti</i>	Fisher	S3
	<i>Ursus arctos</i>	Grizzly Bear	S2S3
Birds	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Northern Goshawk	S3
	<i>Ammodramus leconteii</i>	Le Conte's Sparrow	S3B
	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	Grasshopper Sparrow	S3B
	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Black Tern	S3B
	<i>Cypseloides niger</i>	Black Swift	S1B
	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	Bobolink	S3B
	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Peregrine Falcon	S3B
	<i>Gavia immer</i>	Common Loon	S3B
	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Bald Eagle	S3
	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern	S2B
	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Long-billed Curlew	S3B
	<i>Otus flammeolus</i>	Flammulated Owl	S3B

	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	Brewer's Sparrow	S3B
	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	Forster's Tern	S3B
	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	S3B
	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	Great Gray Owl	S3
Reptiles	<i>Elgaria coerulea</i>	Northern Alligator Lizard	S3
Amphibians	<i>Bufo boreas</i>	Western Toad	S2
	<i>Rana pipiens</i>	Northern Leopard Frog	S1
Fish	<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi</i>	Westslope Cutthroat Trout	S2
	<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	Bull Trout	S2
Invertebrates	<i>Caenis youngi</i>	A Mayfly	S2
	<i>Discus brunsoni</i>	Lake Disc	S1
	<i>Discus shimkii</i>	Striate Disc	S1
	<i>Endopus parvipes</i>	A Millipede	S1S3
	<i>Lophomus latus</i>	A Millipede	S1S3
	<i>Oreohelix alpina</i>	Alpine Mountainsnail	S1
	<i>Oreohelix elrodi</i>	Carinate Mountainsnail	S1
	<i>Orophe cabinetus</i>	A Millipede	S1S3
	<i>Physa megalochlamys</i>	Large-mantle Physa	S1
	<i>Prophysaon humile</i>	Smoky Taildropper	S2S3
	<i>Rhyacophila alexanderi</i>	Alexander's Rhyacophilan Caddisfly	S2
	<i>Zacoleus idahoensis</i>	Sheathed Slug	S2S3
	<i>Zapada cordillera</i>	A Stonefly	S2
Vascular Plants	<i>Acorus americanus</i>	Sweetflag	SH
	<i>Amerorchis rotundifolia</i>	Round-leaved Orchis	S2S3
	<i>Arctostaphylos patula</i>	Green-leaf Manzanita	S1
	<i>Atriplex truncata</i>	Wedge-leaved Saltbush	S1
	<i>Bidens beckii</i>	Beck Water-marigold	S2
	<i>Botrychium sp. (SOC)</i>	Moonworts	S1S3
	<i>Brasenia schreberi</i>	Watershield	S1S2
	<i>Cardamine rupicola</i>	Cliff Toothwort	S3
	<i>Carex lacustris</i>	Lake-bank Sedge	S1
	<i>Carex sychnocephala</i>	Many-headed Sedge	S1
	<i>Carex tinctoria</i>	Slender Sedge	S1
	<i>Centunculus minimus</i>	Chaffweed	S2
	<i>Collomia tinctoria</i>	Yellow-staining Collomia	S1
	<i>Cypripedium fasciculatum</i>	Clustered Lady's-slipper	S2
	<i>Cypripedium passerinum</i>	Sparrow's-egg Lady's-slipper	S2
	<i>Dichanthelium oligosanthes</i> var. <i>scribnerianum</i>	Scribner's Panic Grass	S1
	<i>Drosera anglica</i>	English Sundew	S2S3
	<i>Dryopteris cristata</i>	Crested Shieldfern	S2
	<i>Eleocharis rostellata</i>	Beaked Spikerush	S2
	<i>Epipactis gigantea</i>	Giant Helleborine	S2
	<i>Eriophorum gracile</i>	Slender Cottongrass	S2
	<i>Howellia aquatilis</i>	Water Howellia	S2
	<i>Lilaea scilloides</i>	Flowering Quillwort	SH
	<i>Liparis loeselii</i>	Loesel's Twayblade	S1S2
	<i>Najas guadalupensis</i>	Guadalupe Water-nymph	S1
	<i>Nymphaea tetragona</i> ssp. <i>leibergii</i>	Pygmy Water-lily	S1
	<i>Ophioglossum pusillum</i>	Adder's Tongue	S2
	<i>Oxytropis campestris</i> var.	Columbia Locoweed	S1

	<i>columbiana</i>		
	<i>Polystichum kruckebergii</i>	Kruckeberg's Swordfern	S1
	<i>Potamogeton obtusifolius</i>	Blunt-leaved Pondweed	S2
	<i>Rotala ramosior</i>	Toothcup	S1
	<i>Scheuchzeria palustris</i>	Pod Grass	S2
	<i>Scirpus cespitosus</i>	Tufted Club-rush	S2
	<i>Scirpus heterochaetus</i>	Slender Bulrush	S1
	<i>Scirpus subterminalis</i>	Water Bulrush	S2
	<i>Sidalcea oregana</i>	Oregon Checker-mallow	S1
	<i>Silene spaldingii</i>	Spalding's Campion	S1
	<i>Synthyris canbyi</i>	Mission Mountain kittentails	S3
	<i>Wolffia columbiana</i>	Columbia Water-meal	S2
Nonvascular Plants	<i>Collema curtisporum</i>	Jelly Lichen	S1
	<i>Dicranum fragilifolium</i>	Fragile leaf dicranum moss	S1
	<i>Lobaria hallii</i>	Gray Lungwort Lichen	S2
	<i>Meesia triquetra</i>	Meesia moss	S2
	<i>Neckera douglasii</i>	Douglas' neckera moss	S1
	<i>Parmeliella triptophylla</i>	Lead Lichen	S1
	<i>Phaeophyscia kairamoi</i>	Shadow Lichen	S2
	<i>Pseudocyphellaria anomala</i>	Netted Specklebelly Lichen	S1
	<i>Ramalina obtusata</i>	Hooded Ramalina Lichen	S2
	<i>Ramalina pollinaria</i>	Powdery Twig Lichen	S1
	<i>Scorpidium scorpioides</i>	Scorpidium moss	S2
	<i>Verrucaria kootenaica</i>	Speck Lichen	S1S2

PABLO WMA: The Pablo WMA historically has had numerous upland bird and waterfowl species present on the properties. In recent years, however, with the paving of the county road, the expansion of the town of Polson south towards the WMA, and the completion of the new auto racing facility immediately across the road from the WMA, the conservation values of the WMA have changed the landscape of the WMA enough so that the parcels proposed for disposal no longer serve the purpose for which they were acquired by the State. The portions of Pablo WMA adjacent to the USFWS Pablo National Wildlife Refuge have still retained their conservation value and would be kept in state ownership. The identified parcels of the Pablo WMA that are included in the proposed action would be exchanged for more biologically valuable lands near Ninepipe WMA, Tribal conservation lands, and Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge to the south. Species that use the portions of Pablo WMA to be retained include trumpeter swans and peregrine falcons. There is use by migrating Canada geese and ring-necked pheasants, but the use has declined over time as the area has been developed. The portions proposed for trade are dry pastureland consisting of nonnative grasses and contain no wetlands.

No formal wildlife survey has been completed at Pablo WMA. However, FWP wildlife managers believe the following species could be found at the WMA at various times of the year.

Mammals	<i>Mephitis Mephitis</i>	Striped Skunk
	<i>Microtus Montanus</i>	Montane Vole
	<i>Microtus Pennsylvanicus</i>	Meadow Vole
	<i>Mustela Erminea</i>	Ermine

	<i>Odocoileus Virginianus</i>	White-tailed Deer
	<i>Peromyscus Maniculatus</i>	Deer Mouse
	<i>Sorex Monticolus</i>	Montane Shrew
Birds	<i>Sorex Vagrans</i>	Vagrant Shrew
	<i>Anas Platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard
	<i>Anas Strepera</i>	Gadwall
	<i>Aquila Chrysaetos</i>	Golden Eagle
	<i>Asio Flammeus</i>	Short-eared Owl
	<i>Branta Canadensis</i>	Canada Goose
	<i>Bubo Virginianus</i>	Great Horned Owl
	<i>Buteo Jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed Hawk
	<i>Cathartes Aura</i>	Turkey Vulture
	<i>Circus Cyaneus</i>	Northern Harrier
	<i>Corvus Brachyrhynchos</i>	American Crow
	<i>Corvus Corax</i>	Common Raven
	<i>Falco Sparverius</i>	American Kestrel
	<i>Haliaeetus Leucocephalus</i>	Bald Eagle
	<i>Hirundo Rustica</i>	Barn Swallow
	<i>Molothrus Ater</i>	Brown-headed Cowbird
	<i>Passer Domesticus</i>	House Sparrow
	<i>Phasianus Colchicus</i>	Ring-necked Pheasant
	<i>Pica Hudsonia</i>	Black-billed Magpie
	<i>Poecile Atricapilla</i>	Black-capped Chickadee
	<i>Pooecetes Gramineus</i>	Vesper Sparrow
	<i>Sturnella Neglecta</i>	Western Meadowlark
	<i>Turdus Migratorius</i>	American Robin
	<i>Tyrannus Tyrannus</i>	Eastern Kingbird
	<i>Xanthocephalus</i>	Yellow-headed Blackbird

NINEPIPE Private Property: The private property at Ninepipe WMA, which is proposed to be acquired in trade for portions of Pablo WMA, supports a diverse array of upland and wetland species. Trumpeter swans successfully hatched a clutch of signets on this proposed acquisition property's wetlands two years ago. There are numerous intact pothole/glaciated wetlands that support a diverse array of wetland species (similar to other Ninepipe conservation lands). The property also would block up conservation lands in the Ninepipe area providing linkage and connectivity for numerous species. By protecting critical habitat for breeding waterfowl and nesting upland game birds, trumpeter swans, and grizzly bears, the proposed trade would result in significantly higher conservation values in the Mission Valley.

In 2006 a survey was completed within the FWP-owned properties at Ninepipe WMA. The following is a list of the species recorded and observed there, of which the majority are expected to be found on the private property adjacent to the WMA.

Mammals	<i>Mephitis Mephitis</i>	Striped Skunk
	<i>Microtus Montanus</i>	Montane Vole
	<i>Microtus Pennsylvanicus</i>	Meadow Vole
	<i>Mustela Erminea</i>	Ermine
	<i>Odocoileus Virginianus</i>	White-tailed Deer
	<i>Ondatra Zibethicus</i>	Muskrat
	<i>Peromyscus Maniculatus</i>	Deer Mouse

	<i>Sorex Monticolus</i>	Montane Shrew
	<i>Sorex Vagrans</i>	Vagrant Shrew
Birds	<i>Actitis Macularia</i>	Spotted Sandpiper
	<i>Aechmophorus</i>	Western Grebe
	<i>Agelaius Phoeniceus</i>	Red-winged Blackbird
	<i>Aix Sponsa</i>	Wood Duck
	<i>Anas Acuta</i>	Northern Pintail
	<i>Anas Clypeata</i>	Northern Shoveler
	<i>Anas Crecca</i>	Green-winged Teal
	<i>Anas Cyanoptera</i>	Cinnamon Teal
	<i>Anas Discors</i>	Blue-winged Teal
	<i>Anas Platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard
	<i>Anas Strepera</i>	Gadwall
	<i>Aquila Chrysaetos</i>	Golden Eagle
	<i>Ardea Herodias</i>	Great Blue Heron
	<i>Asio Flammeus</i>	Short-eared Owl
	<i>Asio Otus</i>	Long-eared Owl
	<i>Branta Canadensis</i>	Canada Goose
	<i>Bubo Virginianus</i>	Great Horned Owl
	<i>Buteo Jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed Hawk
	<i>Cathartes Aura</i>	Turkey Vulture
	<i>Charadrius Vociferus</i>	Killdeer
	<i>Chordeiles Minor</i>	Common Nighthawk
	<i>Circus Cyaneus</i>	Northern Harrier
	<i>Cistothorus Palustris</i>	Marsh Wren
	<i>Corvus Brachyrhynchos</i>	American Crow
	<i>Corvus Corax</i>	Common Raven
	<i>Dendroica Petechia</i>	Yellow Warbler
	<i>Empidonax Traillii</i>	Willow Flycatcher
	<i>Euphagus Cyanocephalus</i>	Brewer's Blackbird
	<i>Falco Sparverius</i>	American Kestrel
	<i>Falco Mexicanus</i>	Prairie Falcon
	<i>Fulica Americana</i>	American Coot
	<i>Haliaeetus Leucocephalus</i>	Bald Eagle
	<i>Hirundo Rustica</i>	Barn Swallow
	<i>Larus Californicus</i>	California Gull
	<i>Lanius Ludovicianus</i>	Loggerhead Shrike
	<i>Molothrus Ater</i>	Brown-headed Cowbird
	<i>Oxyura Jamaicensis</i>	Ruddy Duck
	<i>Pandion Haliaetus</i>	Osprey
	<i>Passerculus</i>	Savannah Sparrow
	<i>Passer Domesticus</i>	House Sparrow
	<i>Pelecanus Erythrorhynchos</i>	American White Pelican
	<i>Phalacrocorax Auritus</i>	Double-crested Cormorant
	<i>Phalaropus Tricolor</i>	Wilson's Phalarope
	<i>Phasianus Colchicus</i>	Ring-necked Pheasant
	<i>Pica Hudsonia</i>	Black-billed Magpie
	<i>Podiceps Grisegena</i>	Red-necked Grebe
	<i>Podilymbus Podiceps</i>	Pied-billed Grebe
	<i>Poecile Atricapilla</i>	Black-capped Chickadee
	<i>Pooecetes Gramineus</i>	Vesper Sparrow
	<i>Porzana Carolina</i>	Sora
	<i>Recurvirostra Americana</i>	American Avocet
	<i>Riparia Riparia</i>	Bank Swallow

	<i>Sialia Currucoides</i>	Mountain Bluebird
	<i>Stelgidopteryx Serripennis</i>	Northern Rough-winged Swallow
	<i>Sturnella Neglecta</i>	Western Meadowlark
	<i>Tachycineta Thalassina</i>	Violet-green Swallow
	<i>Tringa Solitaria</i>	Solitary Sandpiper
	<i>Turdus Migratorius</i>	American Robin
	<i>Tyrannus Tyrannus</i>	Eastern Kingbird
	<i>Xanthocephalus</i>	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Amphibian	<i>Chrysemys Picta</i>	Painted Turtle
	<i>Rana Luteiventris</i>	Columbia Spotted Frog
Fish	<i>Lepomis Gibbosus</i>	Pumpkinseed
	<i>Micropterus Salmoides</i>	Largemouth Bass

C. Fisheries

There are no fish species directly associated with either property. The irrigation ditch that moves through the private property at Ninepipe does transport some fish, but they die off annually when the irrigation ditch freezes in winter.

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES

A. Community

PABLO WMA: The property is located within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation in the Mission Valley, north of North Reservoir Road and about 1.5 miles west of Highway 93. The city of Pablo is 3 miles southeast and the city of Polson is 4 miles north of the target parcels.

Since FWP originally purchased the selected parcels at the WMA for a game management area, commercial and residential developments have become established on neighboring and nearby properties. There are 24 residences within a .5-mile radius of the proposed disposal parcels, with some just beyond the parcels' property lines. Additionally, within a 1.5-mile radius, commercial activities include a gravel pit, asphalt operations, radio station with transmission towers, and a local motor speedway. Most of these businesses are within a .5-mile away of the targeted parcels.

The subject parcels are in the Lake County Density Region, which allows for parcels of 20 acres or larger. This restriction is intended to regulate density rather than parcel size in the area per the 2008 Lake County Subdivision Regulations.

NINEPIPE Private Property: This property is located 2.3 miles southeast of the town of Charlo and 9 miles south of the city of Ronan, within the Reservation's boundaries in the Mission Valley. The areas surrounding the targeted parcels are either used for agriculturally based businesses (cattle, crops) or part of the Ninepipe WMA. There are no industrial developments or residential subdivisions nearby.

For the past several summers, the 160-acre parcel has been rented to a local cattle producer for summer pasture with up to 160 head of cattle grazing for approximately 6 months. The agreement between the property owner and rancher is on a year-to-year basis. FWP would likely discontinue grazing on the parcels if the project is approved.

The subject parcels are in the Lake County Density Region, which allows for subdivisions of a property up to the number of hypothetical 40-acre parcels that property contains. Restrictions inherent in the FWS conservation easement allow for one homesite, which can only be placed on the 80-acre parcel (Parcel #2).

B. Taxes and Public Services

PABLO WMA: There are no structures or agricultural improvements on any of the subject parcels nor are electrical services present at the sites. All the parcels are accessible by North Reservoir Road, which the county maintains.

The Pablo WMA encompasses 416 acres of which only 223 acres are identified in this assessment for disposal. In 2008, FWP property taxes for the entire WMA were \$2,526 including water use from the irrigation project, which can be figured at \$8.10/acre. Estimated taxes paid to Lake County for the targeted parcels are \$1,823.

NINEPIPE Private Property: A few agricultural structures (corral, shed, etc.) exist on the parcels for the purpose of handling livestock. Utilities are available, being located along the county road easement adjacent to the property.

In 2008, property taxes for the parcels were \$5,683 including the water usage from the irrigation project.

C. Historical and Cultural

All the parcels identified for this exchange are located within the Flathead Reservation that was established for the Kalispel and Kootenai Tribes in 1855, with the Salish Tribes being added in 1871. The native peoples have used the lands for cultivation of crops, cattle, and have harvested native plants for food and medicinal uses.

The entire Mission Valley has seen a diverse history since Flathead Lake was first visited by a Canadian explorer in 1812. In 1846, a Hudson Bay Company store was opened in St. Ignatius, 10 miles south of the Ninepipe WMA. The following years saw the establishment of the St. Ignatius Mission and the development of the cities Polson and Kalispell. In 1887, the Dawes Act opened the lands of the Reservation to outside settlement that allowed for many people to homestead the area, engaging in agricultural activities including the production of grain, cattle, and horses.

D. Aesthetics and Recreation

PABLO WMA: This WMA is open to the public year round for a variety of recreational opportunities that include hiking, wildlife viewing, photography, picnicking, and hunting. Hunting opportunities are limited to ducks, geese, Hungarian partridge, and ring-necked pheasants.

As previously described, 223 acres of the 416-acre WMA are open space covered by grasses and a limited number of pines. The remaining 193 acres that make up the WMA would be

retained by FWP. These acres are a mix of wetlands and native grasslands with open viewshed of the reservoir and valley areas.

NINEPIPE Private Property: The 240 acres under consideration are subject to a conservation easement held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The Service's conservation easement program concentrates on grasslands and wetlands surrounding Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge (federally owned) and Ninepipe WMA (FWP owned). The easement program seeks to protect and preserve wildlife habitat, open space, and farmland.

The target acres have not been open to the general public for recreational activities, although hunting was allowed at the discretion of the landowner under FWP and Tribal regulations. The parcels provide unobstructed views of the Mission Mountains to the east and across the Mission Valley in all other directions. The 80-acre portion east of Ninepipe Road is just east of the current WMA, and the 160-acre portion is adjacent south of the WMA boundary and north of Sandsmark WPA.

PREDICTED ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

1. LAND USE

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: After the exchange, the Pablo tracts to be transferred into private ownership could be used for any legal, permissible use. They could be used for farming, grazing, limited residential development, or commercial use. The area is density regulated to allow for residences of no more than one per 20 acres. So for example, five residences could be allowed on 100 acres in a cluster or spread throughout the 100 acres. There is some commercial/industrial use to the south and east and, if economically feasible and allowable, portions of the land could be put to that use in the future also.

NINEPIPE Private Property: After the exchange, the private Ninepipe land would become part of the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area. The management objectives would be for conservation and enhancements of wildlife habitat and for public access. The allowable residential and farm building improvements that are allowed under the USFWS easement would not be constructed. Existing improvements would be eliminated. Grazing would be limited, and it would be solicited only when its impacts would improve wildlife habitat. Agricultural crop production and haying dates are limited by the USFWS easement.

If acquired, this property would be managed for upland bird and waterfowl (both resident and migratory) habitat. This includes farming for nesting cover, food plots and nonnative weed control. Wetland habitats would be enhanced or restored and would also provide new public hunting opportunities.

B. No Action Alternative

Management of the lands at the Pablo WMA would not change from current practices with this alternative. The WMA would continue to protect wildlife habitat and to be available for

public recreation activities. The established food plot on Parcel #1 would continue to be maintained by FWP for the benefit of game bird species.

FWP anticipates the current activities on private property adjacent to Ninepipe WMA would continue including seasonal cattle grazing. Any changes to the land's use in the future would be at the discretion of the current owner per the terms of the USFWS conservation easement.

2. SOILS AND PRIME/UNIQUE FARMLAND

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: After exchange, the property may be used for more intense agricultural use than currently occurs. With the lack of surface and ground water at this time, dry-land farming is possible. Without irrigation, the "prime farmland" designation is not applicable. A portion of the property soil types also falls within an area described as Farmland of Statewide and Local Importance although the land has not been used as farmland for many years. There could be some conversion of use if future residential or commercial/industrial development occurs. Any conversion to this type of use would have to meet legal and regulatory standards reviewed by Tribal, County, and Montana authorities.

NINEPIPE Private Property: This property is designated as farmland of local importance, but is not classified as Unique or Prime Farmland. With the exchange, it would no longer have a primary use as livestock pasture, but wildlife habitat instead. Additionally, the USFWS easement prevents conversion by limiting plowing.

B. No Action Alternative

If this alternative were approved, there would be no changes to soil or farmland conditions at Pablo WMA. There are no unique or prime farmlands on any of the targeted WMA's parcels. FWP anticipates the activities on private property adjacent to Ninepipe WMA would continue as they have in the recent past, which does not include any crop production or soil-disturbing actions. Any activities that would change existing soil conditions would require the approval of USFWS per the terms of the USFWS conservation easement.

3. AIR QUALITY

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: FWP anticipates that if there is change in land use of the parcels, such as if the acres are plowed for crops or developed for residential housing, those changes may contribute to a localized change in ambient air quality because of soil disturbing activities. However, hypothetical impacts are not measurable at this time.

NINEPIPE Private Property: No activities are anticipated that would result in any changes in land use that would impact air quality in any way.

B. No Action Alternative

If this alternative were approved, FWP expects there would be no changes to the ambient air quality at either location.

4. WATER RESOURCES

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: The proposed action is not anticipated to result in negative impacts to water quality, floodplains, or wetlands as there are no water resources present on the proposed exchange lands at Pablo, other than the seasonal ditch. FWP does not anticipate any impacts to water resources as a result of the proposed action unless future development occurs that requires groundwater development.

There are no wetlands or floodplains associated with this property per the USFWS Wetlands database and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) database.

NINEPIPE Private Property: Wetlands would continue to be protected and perhaps improved under FWP management because cattle would no longer be using the property and habitat improvement projects would be implemented. No groundwater development for the allowable residential use would occur.

There are no floodplains associated with these parcels per the FEMA database.

B. No Action Alternative

The implementation of this alternative would not influence any of the existing wetlands or ponds that are within the private property parcels since all the water resources are protected from alterations by the USFWS conservation easement. Those habitats would remain available to wildlife for nesting and forage. Since there are no water resources associated with the identified Pablo WMA parcels, with the exception of a seasonal ditch, the implementation of the No Action Alternative would have no effect on this resource.

5. NOISE

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: FWP anticipates that noise levels could initially change if the land is farmed or developed. Hypothetical impacts are not measurable at this time.

NINEPIPE Private Property: No activities are anticipated that would result in any increased noise levels with the exception of possibly seasonal hunting use for waterfowl and game bird species.

B. No Action Alternative

Current noise levels at all the parcels would not be expected to change if the No Action Alternative were implemented because no new activities would be anticipated at either location.

6. VEGETATION

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: Vegetation could change under private ownership if the new owner decides to engage in agricultural activities such as grazing cattle, production of crops or development of the parcels for residential opportunities. At this time, those future uses are unknown. Weed management on the parcels would change since FWP's weed management methodologies would no longer be implemented.

NINEPIPE Private Property: Although vegetation is well managed under the current private ownership, it would change with emphasis on improved wildlife habitat, and FWP would implement its weed management plan to control existing and prevent future noxious weed infestations. Vegetation associated with the existing ponds and wetlands are expected to recover because it would not be grazed or disturbed by livestock.

B. No Action Alternative

Management of the Pablo WMA would continue to focus on the preservation of wildlife habitat for the benefit of wetland and game bird species. FWP would carry on with current operations to control noxious weeds on the parcels and maintain the food plots on the 79 acres at Parcel #1. Public usage of the partially forested Parcel #3 is expected to negatively affect native vegetation as new roads are pioneered through the parcel. Challenges would remain for WMA staff for controlling prohibited activities at Parcels #2 and #3, as they are adjacent to North Reservoir Road and near the raceway.

Wetland and other associate vegetation at the private property near Ninepipe WMA would continue to be protected by the USFWS conservation easement, which would preserve the existing habitats for the benefit of wildlife. The landowner may continue to lease his parcels to local ranchers for cattle grazing in the future, which could affect terrestrial vegetation, but to what extent is unknown and dependent on the decision of the landowner.

7. WILDLIFE

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: The Pablo WMA lands would no longer be under FWP ownership and subsequent public hunting access could be lost. The new owner could develop the area, but it would be subjected to Lake County's housing density regulations. Nesting upland birds and migratory waterfowl could be displaced by development or potential land use changes on the traded parcels of the Pablo WMA.

NINEPIPE Private Property: This property would be conserved in perpetuity. This proposed land trade would provide new public hunting opportunities. The property would be managed for upland bird and waterfowl (both resident and migratory) habitat. This includes farming for nesting cover, food plots, and nonnative weed control. Wetland habitats would also be enhanced or restored and would provide new public hunting opportunities.

There are numerous intact pothole/glaciated wetlands on this property that support a diverse array of wetland species (similar to other federally-owned Ninepipe conservation lands). Trumpeter swans successfully hatched a clutch of signets on the private property wetlands two years ago. The targeted property would block up conservation lands in the Ninepipe area, providing linkage and connectivity for numerous species and their habitats. Breeding waterfowl, nesting upland game birds, trumpeter swans, and grizzly bears would benefit from the significantly higher conservation values in the Mission Valley that would result from the trade.

B. No Action Alternative

FWP would continue to manage the Pablo WMA for the benefit of wildlife, especially waterfowl and upland game birds. No changes to existing management policies would occur. Seasonal bird hunting would still be allowed on the property under the guidance of current FWP hunting regulations.

Current wildlife habitat resources on the private property adjacent to the Ninepipe WMA would continue to be under the protection of the USFWS conservation easement that prohibits manipulation of vegetation or wetlands unless approved by the Service. The decision to allow hunting opportunities on the parcel would be at the discretion of the current landowner.

8. FISHERIES

No impacts are expected on either property since there are no fish species associated with either property if either the Proposed Alternative or No Action Alternative were implemented.

9. COMMUNITY

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: The proposed exchange of these parcels into private ownership would allow the new owners the opportunity to construct residences under the Lake County Density Region plan, which allows for subdivision of large acreages into parcels of 20 acres or larger. Construction of new homes may employ local contractors and use supplies from local businesses, thus helping the local economy. Any changes on the parcels would be subjected to state, county, and Tribal development regulations and review processes.

NINEPIPE Private Property: FWP may use grazing as a tool to improve wildlife habitat in the future; however, if the proposed action were approved, cattle that are currently grazing on the property would need to be removed to another pasture. At this time, there is a year-to-year agreement for the use of the pastures between a local rancher and the landowner. Costs that may be incurred by the rancher for moving his cattle are unknown since FWP does not know where the cattle would be pastured.

B. No Action Alternative

There would be no changes to community resources or local businesses if this alternative were approved.

10. TAXES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: The proposed exchange of these parcels into private ownership would allow the new owners the opportunity to change the existing land use. For instance, they may wish to construct residences under the Lake County Density Region plan, which allows for subdivision of large acreages into parcels of 20 acres or larger. If the new owner chose to develop residences on the three parcels, the property classification would shift from agriculture to residential thus potentially increasing the taxes paid to Lake County. Otherwise the taxes paid to the county would remain at the current classification rate since the land use would stay the same.

NINEPIPE Private Property: Per State Statute 87-1-603, FWP is required to pay Lake County a sum equal to the amount of taxes, which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen. The change of ownership of these parcels would not affect the property tax revenue submitted to the county.

Under FWP ownership, the proposed additions to the WMA would be subject to the management strategies implemented on the rest of the WMA, which prohibits the construction of buildings on the WMA in order to preserve the viewshed, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. This prohibition would be more restrictive than the development terms of the USFWS easement and would eliminate the possibility of additional property tax revenue to Lake County.

B. No Action Alternative

This alternative would not change the tax liability of FWP and the private landowner to pay their taxes for their properties to Lake County. There would be no effects to the county tax base if this alternative were chosen.

11. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

A. Proposed Action Alternative

The Montana State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) was notified of the proposed land exchange and responded in writing in June 2009 (copy of letter is attached as *Appendix A*). SHPO felt that "...there is a low likelihood cultural properties would be impacted feel that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time."

B. No Action Alternative

No historic or cultural resources would be disturbed if the No Action Alternative were implemented because FWP does not plan any groundbreaking activities and would maintain the current groundcover for the benefit of wildlife. The private property parcels are protected by the USFWS conservation easement, which prohibits excavating and plowing in order to preserve and protect wetlands and uplands for nesting and habitat for waterfowl and other ground nesting birds.

12. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

A. Proposed Action Alternative

PABLO WMA: The proposed exchange of ownership of these parcels would likely close them for access by the general public. Only invited guests of the new owners would have access to the transferred acres.

NINEPIPE Private Property: If the 240 acres were to become part of the Ninepipe WMA, the parcels would become open to the general public for a variety of recreational activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, photography, and hunting, all of which are subject to Tribal license requirements. Within the WMA, hunting is restricted to ducks, geese, Hungarian partridge, and ring-necked pheasants and is walk-in only. The viewshed of the Mission Mountains would be preserved, and well as views of the Mission Valley.

The public would be able to access these new WMA additions via county roads at an established parking lot across the road from the 80-acre parcel, and a new parking lot would be established within the 160-acre parcel where there is an existing corral.

B. No Action Alternative

Management of the lands at the Pablo WMA would not change from current practices with this alternative. The WMA would continue to protect wildlife habitat and be available for public recreation activities. The open space and viewshed would remain intact.

The USFWS easement on the Ninepipe private property will preserve the open space values on the parcels. The landowner would have discretion over what recreational activities are allowed on his land. FWP does not know if these would change from the current opportunities in the future.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The action alternative provides a method to further protect existing wetlands in areas adjacent to the federally owned Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge and the state owned Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area, while disposing of parcels that have less resource and wildlife habitat values into private possession.

PABLO

Immediate direct and indirect impacts to the identified three parcels at Pablo WMA, as far as FWP is aware, are very minimal. The potential new owner has no immediate development plans and would likely keep the land as open space. No resource disturbances are anticipated. Since these acres would be under private ownership, cumulative impacts are very difficult to assess because FWP is unaware of the exact nature of those future plans. Future residential, commercial, or industrial uses are conceivable.

NINEPIPE

The acquisition of 240 acres next to the Ninepipe WMA would have direct and indirect positive effects on the existing vegetation, wetlands, and wildlife species by removing livestock from the parcels that can compete for forage and water resources. Additionally, the public would gain access to acres for waterfowl and upland bird hunting previously unavailable. In the foreseeable future, FWP would likely remove some of the deciduous trees that are in close proximity to wetlands in order to remove raptor perches and offer safe refuges to waterfowl. Beyond that possible change in tree density, the new acreage would become part of FWP's Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area and thus be managed for the benefit of wildlife habitat and to provide public access. Minimal manipulation of the habitat would occur with no irreversible consequences.

The movement of the federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration interest to the 240 acres at Ninepipe would not interfere with the terms of the USFWS conservation easement, and would in fact be complimentary to the easement's objective of wildlife habitat conservation.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: Kalispell's *Daily Inter Lake, Lake County Leader, Missoulian*, and Pablo's *Char-Koosta News*;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>; and
- Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

A public meeting will be held at the Ninepipes Lodge, 69286 US Highway 93, Charlo, Montana, on Tuesday, September 22, 2009, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

The public comment period for state purposes will extend for (30) thirty days from the date when the assessment is published by the FWP website. Written comments to this Draft Environmental Assessment will be accepted until October 9, 2009, and can be sent to the following:

Pablo/Ninepipe WMA Land Exchange
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
Or e-mail to jiwilliams@mt.gov

The public comment period for federal purposes will extend for (30) thirty days from the date when the assessment is published by the USFWS website. The Draft EA can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/federalassistance/>. Written comments can be mailed to the address below:

Pablo/Ninepipe WMA Land Exchange
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration
134 Union Blvd.
Lakewood, CO 80228

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Appendices

- A – Montana State Historic Preservation Office Letter
- B – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Letter Regarding their Ninepipe Conservation Easement

Appendix A

Montana State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) concurrence of no effects on historical or cultural resources in the proposed action.

June 24, 2009

Rebecca Cooper
FWP
1420 E. 6th Ave
Helena MT 59601

RE: PABLO WMA & NINEPIPES WMA PROPERTY EXCHANGE. SHPO Project #:
2009062401

Dear Rebecca:

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited project. According to our records there have been no previously recorded sites within the designated search locales. In addition to the sites there have been a few previously conducted cultural resource inventories done in the areas. I've attached a list of these sites and reports. If you would like any further information regarding these sites or reports you may contact me at the number listed below.

It is SHPO's position that any structure over fifty years of age is considered historic and is potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. If any structures are to be altered and are over fifty years old we would recommend that they be recorded and a determination of their eligibility be made.

As long as there will be no disturbance or alteration to structures over fifty years of age we feel that there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted. We, therefore, feel that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time. However, should structures need to be altered or if cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during this project we would ask that our office be contacted and the site investigated.

If you have any further questions or comments you may contact me at (406) 444-7767 or by e-mail at dmurdo@mt.gov <<mailto:dmurdo@mt.gov>>. Thank you for consulting with us.

Sincerely,

Damon Murdo
Cultural Records Manager
State Historic Preservation Office

Appendix B



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Division of Realty - Montana Habitat Program
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, Montana 59404-6133



July 29, 2009

Mr. Adam Brooks
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620


Dear Adam:

This letter is in regard to the Montana Fish, Wildlife Park's (MFWP) proposal to acquire fee title interest in two properties (the Griffith tract in the Mission Valley and Little Doney Lake tract in the Blackfoot Valley) which are currently encumbered with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation easements. I understand that MFWP plans to use some federal funding in these proposal projects, thus requiring consultation with our agency.

Based on the proposals, we strongly support your acquisition and view the proposed management of these tracts as being compatible with the provisions of our conservation easements. We believe that MFWP ownership of these properties will also further benefit the conservation goals of our easement program.

If you have any questions or need additional information don't hesitate to contact me at 406.727.7400 ext 25.

Sincerely,


Gary L. Sullivan
State Coordinator